

(without Green’s consent) to transform the earlier, unsuccessful drafts of his “baseball novel,” *TAOF*, into a highly acclaimed work.² The two baseball novels bear a substantial similarity that could occur only as a result of Harbach’s access to a version (or versions) of *Bucky’s* and his large-scale misappropriation of Green’s creative efforts. There is a proliferation of shared material in the two books, in particular in their third acts, which proceed in lockstep to their uncannily-similar climaxes and denouements. Thus, it is in the critical and defining aspects of the two works — the idiosyncratic resolution of the hero’s journey and the dead-quarterback plot (which plays through the denouement) — that the most striking similarities occur. Taken in the context of common premises, setting and plot lines (the combination of which is especially rare in a baseball story), the uncanny parallelism between the third acts of the books compels the conclusion that Harbach exploited the content of *Bucky’s* as a means of resuscitating his own foundering, perennial work-in-progress.

3. Beginning in the mid-1990s, screenplay versions of *Bucky’s* were widely distributed to companies and individuals in the entertainment business. In the early 2000’s, earlier versions of *Bucky’s* were distributed to prominent literary agencies, chiefly in New York City. From 2005 through 2008, further iterations of *Bucky’s* were also submitted to agents and, subsequently, publishers. As asserted in the media coverage referenced below, Harbach was well connected in literary circles and, upon information and belief, he gained access to a version or versions of *Bucky’s*. Harbach’s next iteration of *TAOF*, which was a transformed draft based on Green’s work, achieved immediate success.

² As just one example of the numerous accolades for *TAOF* since 2011, see <https://www.si.com/extra-mustard/2013/07/19/five-baseball-books-you-owe-it-to-yourself-to-read-this-summer> (describing it as possibly “one of the best baseball novels ever”).

4. Harbach's actions violated the Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 101 *et seq.*, entitling Green to damages, injunctive relief and costs and reasonable attorneys' fees pursuant to 17 U.S.C. §§ 501, 502, 504 and 505.

The Parties

5. Green is a citizen of the State of Texas and he resides in Dallas, Texas. Green is the author of *Bucky's*, which was registered with the U.S. Copyright Office in 2012. (A true and correct copy of the registration is attached hereto as Exhibit A.) The registration notes that *Bucky's* was a completed work as of 2007, and it was given Copyright Registration Number TXu 1-821-468.

6. Upon information and belief, Harbach is currently a citizen of the Commonwealth of Virginia, residing in Charlottesville, Virginia. Upon information and belief, Harbach also maintained a residence in Brooklyn, New York during the relevant time period and he currently transacts business in New York through his participation in the New York-based literary journal *n+1* and through his ongoing relationships with his publishers and his literary agency. Harbach is the author of *TAOF*, which was first published in 2011.

Jurisdiction and Venue

7. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1338(a), the latter of which provides that the district courts shall have original jurisdiction over copyright actions under a federal statute.

8. Harbach is subject to personal jurisdiction pursuant to Section 301 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules ("CPLR") based upon his presence in New York and/or his systematic and continuous business activity here. The Court may also exercise personal

jurisdiction over Harbach pursuant to CPLR § 302(a). The claims in this Complaint arise out of Harbach's transaction of business in the state and/or commission of tortious acts in the state.

9. Venue is proper pursuant to 28 U.S.C § 1400(a). Upon information and belief, Harbach may be found in this District for purposes of 28 U.S.C § 1400(a) in light of his commercial activities in New York, New York and other extensive contacts with the forum.

Factual Background

I. The History of *Bucky's*

10. *Bucky's* was inspired by Green's experiences as a Division III baseball player at Swarthmore College in the mid-1980s. Starting in or around 1994, Green developed a screenplay (later entitled "Bucky's 9th") whose main character is a college baseball player named Bucky. Thereafter, Green adapted the screenplay into a novel that is the precursor to *Bucky's*.

11. From 1994 to 2004, Green produced multiple iterations of the *Bucky's* precursor and the related screenplay. Those documents were circulated widely among agents, publishers, production companies, and studios. Green estimates that variants of these works were seen by in excess of one hundred people in the publishing and entertainment industries.

12. Green's evidence regarding the existence of *Bucky's* and earlier completed versions, which contain the two books' overlapping material, includes numerous drafts in digital format with metadata showing file creation dates from January 2002 through 2007 (and subsequent drafts and dates as well). Additionally, dozens of time-stamped emails extending back to 2004-2005 contain attachments of completed drafts and hundreds of emails contain partial drafts. These emails were sent to and received from Green, his editor (Jess Taylor), his entertainment attorney (Marc H. Glick ("Glick")), and his agent (Matthew Guma). The earliest

extant digital draft of Green's book was created on January 11, 2002 and last modified on January 23, 2002. (A true and correct copy of the metadata for that version is attached hereto as Exhibit B.)

13. From 2005 through 2008, Glick submitted multiple versions of *Bucky's* to a number of literary agents, including: Janklow & Nesbit Associates; Writer's House LCC; Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman Literary Agents; Brandt & Hochman Literary Agents, Inc.; Creative Artists Agency; The Steinberg Agency, Inc.; and The Guma Agency ("Guma"). Guma took on Green and submitted the manuscript in 2006 to several publishers and then broadly to numerous publishers (in the version in which copyright is registered) over the course of 2006 and 2007, but did not elicit interest in acquiring the work for publication.

14. Since the publication of *TAOF* in 2011, Green has been blocked in pursuing the publication of *Bucky's* given the volume of content shared by these two "baseball books" and, further, given the substantial similarity of their critical elements — elements that normally make books stand as independent works, not make them appear bizarrely alike.

II. The Reported and Publicized History of *TAOF*

15. *TAOF* was the subject of an illuminating October 2011 *Vanity Fair* article by Harbach's friend Keith Gessen, entitled "How a Book Is Born: The Making of *The Art of Fielding*" (the "Article"). (A true and correct copy of the Article is attached hereto as Exhibit C.) Gessen subsequently expanded and published the article as a 20,000-word e-book. Gessen provides some of the chronology of the evolution of *TAOF* and, in interviews, Harbach has confirmed aspects of the story.³

³ Background information on Mr. Gessen is available at https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Gessen. Upon information and belief, Mr. Gessen is currently an assistant professor of journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and, among other things, he was the regular book critic for *New York Magazine* from 2004 to 2005.

16. Upon information and belief, Harbach began working on a baseball-themed novel in the period 2000 to 2004. In or around early to mid-2006, Gessen read a full-length manuscript of Harbach's novel. Gessen wrote that: "It was good, but it struck me as a little light. ... I didn't say it at the time, but it felt a little like a Disney film. (The Bad News Bears go to liberal-arts college.) I was surprised that my friend had spent five years working on something so insubstantial." Gessen noted that, by around 2007 or 2008, Harbach was desperate: "Chad no longer had a job and I was beginning to worry. I knew he was going back and re-writing early sections of his book. ... And Chad had run out of money. For years he had been ignoring his student loans, and in our Brooklyn apartment we could no longer answer our landline, because the collection agencies now called so often. Without having seen the book, I began to urge him to just send it out to agents and see what happened. The truth is I wasn't confident anyone would want it; I thought Chad should move on to his next novel, or something else entirely."

17. Gessen's description of Harbach's life of penury at this time is echoed by an April 21, 2012 article in the *Los Angeles Times*: "A long-suffering, often-starving MFA graduate, Harbach spent much of his 20s and 30s working temp jobs so he could write a novel, sometimes with barely \$100 in his bank account." (<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/21/entertainment/la-et-chad-harbach-20120421>.)

18. In or around 2009, Gessen read a new version of Harbach's novel. Gessen described the work as "transformed," writing in the Article that:

The relationships had taken on a depth that they hadn't previously had; the story of the throw and its aftermath had acquired a kind of resonance that would have been hard to anticipate in the early versions. This was no longer a Disney movie. ... There was a whole world here, and it was very moving, and very generous, and humane.

19. In the Article, Gessen frankly admits to being mystified by the novel's evolution and emergence from its previous ugly duckling status. Gessen ambiguously wrote that "[i]t was as if time itself had written this book" and, although "time" had written the book, Chad had "become its conduit." Gessen concluded with a telling question that he was unable to answer: "How had he done this? I don't know: I'd sat next in the next room or at the next table, I'd been there the whole time, and I still don't know."

20. *Bucky's* provides the answer for Gessen's trenchant queries on the mystery of how Harbach had "done" it. As alleged below, it is evident that Harbach, without Green's knowledge or consent, (1) gained access to a version of *Bucky's*; and (2) used *Bucky's* as a magic wand, by stripping Green's proprietary material out of *Bucky's* and dressing up *TAOF* with it.

21. Upon information and belief, Harbach gained access to a version of *Bucky's* prior to the transformation of *TAOF*. Indeed, Gessen notes throughout the Article that Harbach and his associates had a wealth of contacts in the literary world during the relevant time period. As an example of this vast and immediate network, one of Harbach's co-editors at *n+1* worked (during the relevant time) as a fiction editor at one of the publishers to which *Bucky's* had been pitched, and submitted by Guma for consideration, in the 2006-2008 period.

III. Overlap between *Bucky's* and *TAOF*

22. There are extensive — and substantial — similarities between *Bucky's* and *TAOF* in terms of their premise and setting, plot/structure, content, idiosyncratic authorial choice, and the near-exact timing of events (including stand-alone details, scene sequencing and recurrent

themes). Those similarities, set forth in further detail in the Appendix to the Complaint, are summarized act by act below.

A. Act I: Premise and Setting

23. Both *Bucky's* and *TAOF* operate in the same sub-genre: a baseball story. They also share certain conventions that are common to sports narratives, such as the tale of a perennial and disadvantaged underdog which defeats its long-superior rivals and is led by a talented, but troubled, prodigy. (*See* Appendix, 1-3.) However, the two novels have the same unconventional premise and setting: a small, obscure and financially struggling (yet academically proud) liberal arts school whose athletic teams compete in the lowest collegiate ranks, Division III, and thus do not have the benefit of athletic scholarships. (*Id.*, 2.) Extensive research has not turned up any other published or produced baseball story where the same type of coming-of-age/underdog/baseball plot has a similar setting.

24. Even if the shared premise and setting were mere coincidence, a reader would expect independent works to diverge along the way. Here, by contrast, the two novels converge and share a substantial amount of content, which frequently occurs in virtually the same places and in the same sequences in both books.

B. Act II: Plot and Structure

25. Each work is anchored by four core narratives: (1) the Baseball Prodigy-Comes-of-Age-Plot; (2) the Recruiter-Mentor Plot; (3) the Illicit-Romance Plot; and (4) the Intergenerational Plot. (*See id.*, 3-6.) Individually, these plots may be conventional; however, the appearance of all four plots in both baseball books — and, critically, the same way they are developed — provides powerful evidence of substantial similarity between *Bucky's* and *TAOF*.

(1) *Baseball Prodigy-Comes-of-Age Plot*

26. The two novels have a main character (the “Prodigy”) whose background and baseball career, reception at college, downfall, and redemption are uncannily similar. (*See id.*, 3-

4.) In both books, the Prodigy joins an astonishingly-similar eccentric group of teammates:

- Players read books on the bench during game action (*id.*, Addendum A (i));
- The ace pitcher (Al in *Bucky’s* and Adam in *TAOF*) is a primping lothario, who is more concerned with the way he appeals to the opposite sex in his uniform than with winning games (*id.*, Addendum C (vii));
- The team captain, a senior (Tischler in *Bucky’s* and Tennant in *TAOF*) is the shortstop, whose position the Prodigy usurps (*see id.*, 4).

27. The Prodigy’s downfall and redemption are particularly telling. In both works, the Prodigy deserts his team. The Prodigy returns to the team during its first-ever championship game. He enters this game only as a pinch-hitter in the bottom of the ninth inning, with his team trailing by one run, with a man on first and two outs. The climactic scene, the one that readers naturally anticipate, will surely end with the hero (1) saving the day by hitting a home run for the win, or at least driving in the runner on first, or (2) striking out ignominiously in a replay of “Casey at the Bat.” Instead, the Prodigy welcomes getting hit in the head with the baseball (“beaned” in baseball parlance). The highly unusual and odd use of the beaning as a dramatic device in those specific circumstances constitutes, by itself, a substantial similarity between these baseball books.

(2) *Recruiter-Mentor Plot*

28. The two works feature a character (the “Recruiter-Mentor”) who discovers the Prodigy, demonstrating his graceful, preternatural ability in a pointedly seedy, dead-end environment. (*See id.*, 3.) The Recruiter-Mentors in each novel have a number of attributes in common:

- Orphaned young and became the ward of an aunt;
- Story's lone proletarian, having worked in a foundry;
- Sees law school as a way out of the working-class trap;
- Clings to "I've had it rough lament" as a way of being morally superior to the middle-class milieu of college life and, as a result, feels isolated;
- Rails against dubious future, but, by the novel's conclusion, accepts being a Division III college coach as an honorable compromise.

(*Id.*, 5.)

(3) *Illicit-Romance Plot*

29. The two novels include an illicit romantic relationship between a baseball team member and a college administrator. The relationship is a critical aspect of the story; the scandal threatens the administrator's career because there are allegations that the player's financial aid is being protected as a result of the player's involvement with the administrator. (*See, e.g., id.*, 5 and 8.)

(4) *Intergenerational Plot*

30. Both works' premises feature a long-running estrangement between a father and his adult child:

- Father has reached the pinnacle of success in his field, whereas adult child has dropped out of school and thrown away an Ivy League education;
- Father is a former quarterback, who dies under ambiguous circumstances in the midst of a potentially career-wrecking scandal;
- Adult child suspects the father may have committed suicide;
- Filial duty drives adult child to resort to illegal measures to cover up possibility of suicide by moving the body, thus preserving father's reputation.

(*See id.*, 5-6.)

C. Act III: Baseball Climax and Denouement

The shared material — and that which is most substantially harmful to Green’s unpublished work — is starkly and startlingly evident in the third acts of each work. During their third acts, the plots move forward in virtual lockstep:

- After years of indifference to its long-moribund baseball program, the college community notices the team is on the rise;
- The team’s Prodigy goes AWOL;
- There is a “Spahn and Sain” reference to pejoratively describe the team’s pitching staff;⁴
- In the final 24 hours before the first-ever championship game, there is a sudden threat of upset to the college community: looming scandal involving a baseball player, college administrator and misuse of financial aid;
- Facing the threat of scandal, the exposed character seeks guidance from a statue of his lifelong idol. The statue visit is immediately juxtaposed with character’s indulgence in a magic-realist football reverie of a last-second pass thrown long ago;
- During the championship game, the Recruiter-Mentor recognizes that the team has come into its own. The Prodigy’s inspiration and dedication have served their purpose, his absence having brought out the best in his teammates;
- AWOL Prodigy returns;
- In late-inning action the team’s power hitter erases the chalk line in the batter’s box with his size fourteen spikes;
- Prodigy joins the game only in the 9th inning, as a pinch-hitter, with two outs, a runner on first, and his team down by one run;
- The pitch count runs to two strikes and no balls (“0-2”), instead of the classic do-or-die situation of a 3-2 count;
- The story abruptly switches to the pitcher’s point of view; the pitcher suddenly feels at risk rather than being in control, despite the advantageous count, and considers going after the batter, disregarding the chance that it could result in putting the go-ahead run on base;

⁴ Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain were pitchers on the then-Boston Braves in 1948, and a writer covering the team composed a poem lamenting the quality of the pitching staff after Spahn and Sain. (See http://www.baseball-almanac.com/poetry/po_rain.shtml.) The upshot of the poem is that, after the pitching appearances of Spahn and Sain, the fans should hope for “two days of rain” so that the rest of the rotation would be skipped and the two stars of the staff could pitch again.

- As the ball hurtles toward home, Prodigy sees the beaming as his salvation and greets it with relief, rather than disappointment about not being the hero;
- Following the championship game: cover-up of father's apparent suicide by adult child and Recruiter-Mentor's reconciliation to a less-than-glorious but still worthy future.

(See generally *id.*, 6-7 and 9-13.)

31. The climactic beaming scene calls for further examination. As noted above, the Prodigy in both works is at the plate in the same situation: two outs, 0-2 count, with a runner on first, down by a run in the first-ever baseball championship for a perennial Division III college loser. At that very point in the story, both authors shift the focus from the Prodigy to the pitcher. The pitcher makes the aberrant decision to risk putting the ball near the Prodigy and his bat, even though it is common practice at every level of baseball — from Opening Day in Little League to the seventh game of the Major League World Series — for a pitcher with the advantage of an 0-2 count to throw far away from the batter and the strike zone, such as high and outside or low and in the dirt. This is known as “wasting a pitch.” It is significant that, in both works, the pitchers decide to flout everything they’ve ever been taught about working an 0-2 count and throw high and inside — with the acknowledged risk of hitting the Prodigy — under the same circumstances. (See *id.*, 10-12.)

32. It would strain credulity to attribute the high level of similarity in the third act described above to mere coincidence. What should be a unique, never-seen-before culmination of the hero's journey in the vast canon of great American baseball stories instead is seen twice in the same era, in the same specialized setting, *i.e.*, Division III college, rather than Little League, high school, the minors, the majors, or even Division I college. Moreover, a reader of both of *TAOF* and *Bucky's* could draw only one of two inferences from how these baseball novels start in the same unusual world and cap the journey through that world in the same atypical ways:

- The structural principles of all underdog/coming-of-age Division III baseball stories dictate a plot that builds to the hero's deserting his team only to return for his beaming as a pinch-hitter in the 9th inning of a first-ever championship — down one, two outs, with a count of 0-2 — and then a return to the tragic story of a former quarterback, who has died under mysterious circumstances in the midst of a potentially career-wrecking scandal, and the disposition of his remains by his adult child, who suspects suicide, or
- *TAOF* and *Bucky's* have a genetic relationship, and thus one of these baseball novels is derivative of the other.⁵

D. Additional Shared Content

33. A sampling of the stand-alone duplications between the two works is below:

<i>Bucky's</i>	<i>TAOF</i>
College named after a woman, Alice Deal	College named after a woman, Maria Westish
Character named Pee Wee Cox	Character named Coach Cox
Characters named Sarah and Julie	Characters named Sarah and Julie
Female lead in lilac miniskirt	Female lead in lilac dress
Lone character identified as Korean named "Sookie"	Lone character with evidently Korean surname named "Sooty"
Ballplayer named McDougal	Ballplayer named Dougal
College athlete named Lopez	College athlete named Lopez
Relief pitcher nicknamed "Crazy"	Relief pitcher nicknamed "Loonie"
Classic car — 15 references to "the Olds"	Classic car — 10 references to "the Buick"
College team named for a tree	College team named for a tree
Ballplayer referred to as "the Buddha"	Ballplayer referred to as "the Buddha"
South Carolina as competition in NCAA's	South Carolina as venue of NCCA's

⁵ The Appendix contains additional details on how the two works describe other events in the third act at roughly the same point in the text and with similar language and/or imagery. (*See id.*, 6-13.)

(*Id.*, 6.) A further list of stand-alone duplications may be found in Addendum A to the Appendix.⁶

IV. The Events Leading Up to the Publication of *TAOF*

34. In the Article, Gessen recounts the publication of *TAOF* after its rapid and mysterious transformation in or around 2008/2009.

35. According to the Article and widespread media coverage elsewhere, the retooled *TAOF* was (in stark contrast to the cold reception given to earlier versions) a hit and sparked a competition among several publishers.

36. Gessen notes that Harbach declined a pre-emptive offer of \$175,000 for the publication and instead his agent conducted an auction, which yielded a winning offer from a publisher of \$665,000, which is extraordinary for a first novel. A contemporaneous headline from Bloomberg.com captured the noteworthy event (although short-changing Harbach by \$15,000): “Unemployed Harvard Man Auctions Baseball Novel for \$650,000.”

V. *TAOF* Film Deal

37. In May 2017, IMG and Mandalay Sports Media announced their intention to produce a film based on *TAOF*. (See <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/art-fielding-movie-works-img-mandalay-999084>.)

38. Trade publications have reported that a director and screenwriter are already in place. (See, e.g., <http://www.tracking-board.com/craig-johnson-to-direct-the-art-of-fielding-for-varsity-blues-producer/>.) That, in the customary practices of the film industry, puts the project in

⁶ There is shared content in several other scenes (in addition to the ones discussed above), where both novels handle the same plot events with strikingly overlapping imagery, language and tone. (See *id.*, 13-15 and Addendum C.)

pre-production (as opposed to its being merely “in development”). A film containing Green’s proprietary content would do further harm to the publishing or production prospects of *Bucky’s*.

39. Upon information and belief, Harbach has benefitted financially (in an amount to be determined) from the agreement regarding a film adaptation of *TAOF*.

Count I
(Damages for Copyright Infringement)

40. Green realleges and incorporates herein by reference all of the preceding paragraphs of the Complaint as if set forth in full below.

41. As alleged above, Harbach infringed on Green’s copyright through (i) the misappropriation of critical elements found in *Bucky’s* (and other versions of the work); and (ii) the resulting publication of *TAOF*. The substantial similarities detailed above provide strong evidence of infringement, and they further demonstrate that Harbach must have had access to a version (or versions) of *Bucky’s* at various points in time.

42. Harbach’s infringement has continued to date, including (among other things) Harbach’s entry into an agreement for a film adaptation of *TAOF*.

43. Harbach’s actions constitute copyright infringement under 17 U.S.C. §§ 106 and 501, and they are the direct and proximate cause of injuries to Green.

44. Accordingly, Green requests relief in the form of damages from Harbach, pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 504, in an amount to be determined at trial. Pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 505, Green also seeks the recovery of his full costs, including reasonable attorneys’ fees, incurred in connection with this action.

Count II
(Injunctive Relief)

45. Green realleges and incorporates herein by reference all of the preceding paragraphs of the Complaint as if set forth in full below.

46. The Copyright Act provides that the Court may “grant temporary and final injunctions on such terms as it may deem reasonable to prevent or restrain infringement of a copyright.” 17 U.S.C. § 502.

47. As alleged above, Harbach has entered into an agreement for a film adaptation of *TAOF*, which constitutes a copyright infringement. The release of such a film would result in a further copyright infringement and could also warrant injunctive relief.

48. Accordingly, Green requests that the Court enter a permanent injunction, pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 502, barring Harbach from taking additional steps to further the film version of *TAOF*. Green reserves the right to seek a preliminary injunction or a temporary restraining order on the same grounds and pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 502.

Demand for Jury Trial

Green hereby demands a jury trial on all claims for which trial by jury is available.

Relief Requested

WHEREFORE, Green requests the entry of a judgment in his favor awarding (a) damages against Harbach under Count I and pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 504; (b) an injunction against Harbach, as requested in Count II and in a form to be determined by the Court, pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 502; (c) costs and reasonable attorneys’ fees pursuant to 17 U.S.C § 505; and (d) such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

Dated: September 14, 2017

Respectfully submitted,

By: Pieter Van Tol

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APPENDIX

Content Shared by
New York Times-bestselling *The Art of Fielding* (Little, Brown; 2011)
and
Bucky's 9th (unpublished, submitted by agent, 2006-7, to
all major trade publishers)

I. Summary/Overview

Bucky's 9th and *The Art of Fielding* each chronicle a miracle championship-contention season of the baseball team at a small American liberal arts college whose athletes play in NCAA Division III.

Comparative reading of the two books reveals extensive, diverse commonalities beyond their broad-strokes subject matter and genre-driven coincidence. The points in common run the gamut from

aspects of fiction typically discussed in book groups and high school English classes: plot, incident, structure, characterization, conflict, setting, theme, and visual imagery

to

literary/storytelling devices, semantics and idiosyncratic phrasing of the sort picked up by editors, critics and academics: uncannily specific duplications in word-use, verbal imagery, cadence, tone, plot mechanics, mood and atmosphere.

Plot and Structure

Textual Details, Passages, and Scene Sequencing

Similarity in Extended, Patterned Clusters

Section III

Section IV

Section V

II. Premises, Setting; Genre and Convention vs Authorial Choice

It is a given that there are only so many ways to write a sports story, a coming-of-age story, or a college story. Put the three together and overlap becomes probable, especially in stories' premises, where the conventions of genre and/or standard aspects of the depicted milieus exert themselves.

The common ground on which *Bucky's 9th* ("B9") and *The Art of Fielding* ("TAOF") both open is plausibly a function of genre, sports-story convention, and the realities of college life and of baseball.

1) loser-underdogs, last-place team in the league¹:

B9: "No team in the school's fifty-three-year history has ever come close to winning the division. Not even in Joe Hanks's day." (p. 10)

"One day Willie had paused at the equipment room wall, plastered with framed team photos. He scoured the faces from Joe Hanks' squad to the early '90s, which was when the wall ran out of space. They all deserved a place up there, and Willie wondered which bunch would have to step aside for this year's picture. Swallowing a lump, he said in a hoarse voice, 'This one's for all of us.'" (p. 88)

¹ Texts cited: *Bucky's 9th*, version submitted to publishers by The Guma Agency, 2006-2007; *The Art of Fielding*, Little, Brown hardcover first edition, September 2011.

TAOF: “All those losing seasons. And not just for us. For all the guys who came before us too. A hundred and four years of baseball, and Westish College, our college, has never won conference. Never.” (p. 160)

B9: “the worst-place team in college baseball history” ... “after seven seasons of owning last place, the Oaks have become a laughingstock” (pp. 7-8, 10)

TAOF: “the Westish Harpooners had been crappy for too many years to count” (p. 11)

- 2) they are loser-underdogs because they are the financially disadvantaged teams of their leagues:

B9: “The school needs money any which way it can get it” (p. 34)

TAOF: “I’m sure Westish College needs all the money it can scrape together” (p. 12)

B9: “...private contributions have dried up.” (p. 14)

TAOF: “...there’s almost nothing coming in from donors.” (p. 59)

- 3) David v. Goliath—the underfunded, underinspired team perennially trounced by well-heeled rivals:

B9: “where was this guy a couple years ago when Alice Deal [College] started double-digitting us?” (p. 58)

TAOF: “they had never, in one hundred seasons, won a conference title. Their opponents, the Coshwale Muskies, had captured twenty-nine in that same time span, including four in a row” (p. 380)

- 4) an agent of the team recruits a baseball prodigy who will amount to nothing if he doesn’t take the chance; neither the stellar recruit nor anyone else can account for his preternatural gift:

B9: “A few years you haven’t swung a bat? How’d I miss all this? [...] ‘Yeah, but that carnival, right?’ Willie eyes me guardedly. ‘How’d you do that?’ ‘I honestly don’t know.’” (p. 39)

TAOF: “‘Damn Skrim!’ Starblind yelled. ‘Where’d that come from?’ Henry didn’t know. He tried to remember the footwork but the moment had passed.” (p. 38)

B9: “Coach, I’ve seen a few plays like that in my lifetime. Not a single one by a deaf teenager.” (p. 85)

TAOF: “I’ve seen a lot of baseball, Guert. But never have I seen someone like Henry.” (p. 66)

It is noteworthy that in addition to these shared starting points, both novels choose the same far-from-conventional setting: a small, off-the-grid but academically proud liberal arts college whose athletic teams play in Division III—the depths of the NCAA, where there are no athletic scholarships. Baseball fiction has brought readers and audiences to just about every other conceivable venue and level of competition:

The Natural—a phenom comes out of nowhere to play in the bigs

You Know Me, Al—a lummock of an ace pitcher in the bigs

Bang the Drum Slowly—major league catcher’s journey from struggle to greatness to early death

Damn Yankees—a fan makes a deal with the devil so his hometown major league team can win

A League of Their Own—the first years of women’s professional baseball

Major League—a bunch of misfits turn their professional club around

Eight Men Out—the 1919 Black Sox scandal, dramatized in book and movie

Shoeless Joe/Field of Dreams—a farmer finds redemption for J. Jackson/1919 Black Sox scandal
Bull Durham—life in the minor leagues
Bingo Long's Traveling All-Stars—barnstorming Negro League team
The Bad-News Bears—Little League misfits get help from ringers
The Great American Novel—farce about replacement players in major leagues during WWII

As far as Google enables a curious reader to determine, the long-thriving industry of baseball stories has produced no other narrative vehicles that cohabit the abstruse, lackluster realm chosen by the authors of both *B9* and *TAOF*. On its own, this choice of the least glorious stratum of intercollegiate sport would make either work unique in the canon of baseball narratives.

Independently created works, as they move through rising action, conflict escalations and resolutions, can be expected, even if they bear such likeness in premises, to become less and less alike, via increasing reliance on content arising from authorial choice.

Yet such subjective, non-generic choices, ostensibly made by each book's author, reveal prolific similarities of detail, action and phrasing. The two works not only do not diverge, they converge.

III. Comparative Plots and Structures

Each presents a multi-stranded, braided story, anchored by four core narratives.

Taken individually, any of these storylines is fairly conventional.

As these plots develop and intertwine, in each book, they become, in the aggregate, implausibly alike.

The Baseball-Prodigy-Comes-of-Age Plot

Prodigy, whose baseball career dates from a bonding interaction with his father in his formative years, is discovered by a character who needs someone just like him, and who only in the moment perceives that need—the Recruiter-Mentor. The discovery takes place in a pointedly seedy environment, where the Prodigy demonstrates his preternatural skill with a ball:

B9, p. 7
a carnival with “ramshackle rides,”
where the Prodigy throws from “an ice-hard
mound flattening from roadway to water’s
edge, wedged between a natural gas terminal
and a sewage treatment plant”

TAOF, p. 3
“...this ramshackle ballpark between a
junkyard and an adult bookstore”

He arrives at the school physically unprepared for college-level competition—one underweight, one overweight. He enrolls late, once the class he is joining has already formed. He is admonished that although recruited for his athletic prowess he will have to perform up to academic standard.

B9, p. 38
“‘I’m sure Coach Chance told you we have
high standards at Hill. We’re proud of our
academic reputation.’”

TAOF, p. 13
“‘Westish is not your average school. The
academics are tough...’”

He is immediately cast as the outsider.

He has to endure the indignity of being imposed on a roommate and teammate who thought he had the privilege of a dorm room to himself and is displeased by the Prodigy's invasion.

The Prodigy's other new teammates greet his arrival as a mock Second Coming:

B9, pp. 40-41

“This physical specimen of a moose covering third yells hey at Willie and signs what seems to be, ‘This is the savior?’”

TAOF, p. 30

“‘So you’re the guy Schwartz keeps talking about... the baseball messiah.’”

At the same point in the season in both books (win-and-loss records: 1 & 8; 1 & 7), with other players wanting to see him in action, the Prodigy nabs **the shortstop position from the team's captain, a senior:**

B9, p. 58

“‘But frankly I don’t care if he knocks over liquor stores, as long as he helps us win.’ Booeey and she put their hands together in a sign of solidarity. Al absently taps their hands with his left, but Tischler keeps signing. ‘Win what? We’re 1-8.’”

TAOF, p. 43

“‘You know it’s only my first year,’ Henry said. ‘I can wait.’ ‘Maybe you can.’ Schwartz didn’t look up. ‘But the rest of us can’t. We’re one and seven’”

Prodigy's usurpation of the veteran's position plays through in a locker room altercation resulting in a bloody nose. [*TAOF*, p. 44-45; *B9*, p. 40]

Meanwhile, the Prodigy gets a glimmer of hope that he will find at least one kindred spirit here: he discovers a familiar yet esoteric book on another character's bookshelf. [*TAOF*, p. 15; *B9*, p. 50, p. 79]

The Prodigy is playing for this Division III team despite the fact he has evident pro prospects:

B9, p. 39.

“‘every scout in the Tri-state area camped behind the backstop’”

TAOF, p. 49

“the scouts were loitering in their Ray-Bans behind the backstop”

A critical moment for each Prodigy comes when he is extracted, all but forcibly, from a state of hyperbolic squalor into which he has descended. [An important note for purposes of clarity: Henry Skrimshander and Kenesaw “Bucky” Bucks both go AWOL during their teams' runs to the championship; Bucky also went AWOL in his back story—his desertion of his Princeton team initiated his alienation from baseball.]

The Prodigy, with Recruiter-Mentor's coaching, leads team in an unprecedented run to the championship.

During that run, the Prodigy goes AWOL, deserting his teammates. The Prodigy's AWOL catalyzes:

- the abandoned team's coming into its own, without the Prodigy
- the Prodigy's eventual coming of age, and discovery that there is more to life than baseball, more than living up to/competing with the god-like athlete he has spent his life idolizing
- the Recruiter-Mentor's coming to terms with his lot as a coach in Division III

The Prodigy returns to the diamond in the 9th inning of the championship game—where instead of hitting the expected homerun, or striking out, with two outs and the count of 0-2, he gets beamed in the head.

The Recruiter-Mentor Plot

The two Recruiter-Mentors have a remarkable number of attributes in common. Each:

- was orphaned young and wound up the ward of an aunt;
- has, as the story's lone proletarian, tasted blue-collar hell—by working in a foundry;
- recognized law school as a ticket out of the working-class trap;
- clings to his "I've had it rough" lament as a way of being both morally superior to and aloof from the middle-class college milieu in which he is isolated; voices bitterness and resentment in fire-and-brimstone exhortations of his team's players;
- in the Prodigy's absence, leads, challenges, hectors and despairs over the team;
- rails against his also-ran fate, but ultimately embraces an honorable compromise in accepting his place as a coach in Division III.

The Illicit-Romance Plot

An out-of-bounds intimacy develops between a college officer and baseball-playing student:

- the administrator in each case is drawn irresistibly to the student not solely by his physical attractiveness, but by the fact he is the odd man out on the baseball team (one, despite having perfectly good hearing, is clandestinely enrolled at a school for the deaf; the other is gay and bi-racial);
- the administrator romanticizes coffee-drinking as a time-honored couples' ritual, but the student scoffs:

B9, pp. 135-136

“To some people, evidently, variety is the spice of life. Others may want to know that the same person will be there every day when they wake up. And maybe every morning read the paper and drink coffee together.”

[...]

“Well guess what? I don't drink coffee anyway.”

TAOF, p. 281

“‘I... we drink coffee.’ He sounded pleading and inane, trying to imbue these three simple words, this one banal act, with all the import and sentiment it held for him.

‘Everybody drinks coffee,’ Owen said.”

The Intergenerational Plot

A long-running estrangement between:

the Father who has reached the pinnacle of success in his highly visible field and:

- whose absorption in himself and his career accomplishments has led to a distant, strained relationship with his Adult Offspring;
- once enjoyed a dubious reputation as a ladies' man, never as a family man;
- nearing his career's culmination, engages in reckless, irresponsible behavior;
- thus precipitating a scandal in which he faces the threat of exposure and disgrace;
- cheats the scandal by dying suddenly and under ambiguous circumstances;

the Adult Offspring who has, in the backstory, dropped out of school and thrown away an Ivy League education and:

- has gone out West, to escape the Father's shadow and expectations that she/he will follow in Father's footsteps, but failed to escape and is now drawn back;
- starts at college mid-semester, as a freshperson, though a few years older than his/her cohort
- carries alone, in his/her gut, a certainty that the Father's death was a suicide;

- takes filial duty to mean covering up any evidence of that, to conceal the Father's guilt, and shore up his reputation;
- in order to fulfill that duty resorts to illegal measures.

IV. Text Analysis: Details, Passages, and Scene Sequencing

The shared content most readily apparent consists simply of random duplications. A sampling:

B9:

College named Alice Deal
 Pee Wee Cox
 Sarah and Julie
 the female lead in lilac miniskirt
 lone character identified as Korean named
 "Sookie"
 ballplayer named McDougal
 college athlete named Lopez
 relief pitcher nicknamed "Crazy"
 a personified classic car—15 references to
 "the Olds"/"Oldsmobile"
 college team named for a tree
 ballplayer referred to as "the Buddha"
 South Carolina as competition in NCAA's

TAOF:

College named Maria Westish
 CoachCox
 Sarah and Julie
 the female lead in lilac dress
 lone character with evidently Korean
 surname named "Sooty"
 ballplayer named Dougal
 college athlete named Lopez
 relief pitcher nicknamed "Loonie"
 a personified classic car—10 references to
 "the Buick"
 college team named for a tree
 ballplayer referred to as "the Buddha"
 South Carolina as venue of NCAA's

[Further inventories of stand-alone points of this kind appear in Addendum A.]

The proliferation of shared material is most starkly evident in the story's third acts. As the stories move toward their finales, they rely increasingly on multi-item clusters of similar and often identical authorial choices.

These clusters form an aggregate of event, expression and imagery that is much the same in both books.

Within the aggregate, moreover, an extraordinary temporal overlap appears; similar incidents and scenes occur at the same points—measured as a percentage of elapsed page-count—in each work.

By the start of the third act of each novel, the plots move forward in virtual lockstep:

after years of indifference to its long-moribund baseball program, the college community notices the team is on the rise.

the team wins a critical game, reaching championship contention—and panics because they've lost their Prodigy, who has gone AWOL.

in the final 24 hours before the championship game, a sudden threat of upset to the college community: looming scandal involving a baseball player, college official and misuse of financial aid.

facing threat of scandal, exposed character seeks the mute guidance of a statue of his lifelong idol; statue visit is immediately juxtaposed with character's indulgence in a magic-realist football reverie.

during the championship game, Recruiter-Mentor recognizes that team has, through the absence of the Prodigy, come into its own—his star recruit’s inspiration and dedication have served their purpose, and the Prodigy’s going AWOL has brought out the best in his teammates.

With players already on the field, the AWOL Prodigy returns.

In late inning actions, the opposing pitcher rationalizes doing the unthinkable: putting the go-ahead run on base.

Prodigy, having joined the game only in the 9th inning, as a pinch-hitter—with two outs and a runner on first, and his team down by one run—opts for the ultimate sacrifice: get beamed in the head, forsaking glory.

Epilogue, following the championship game: the cover-up of the Father’s apparent suicide; Recruiter-Mentor’s reconciliation to a less-than-glorious but still worthy future.

The evening before the must-win game to go to the championship or go home:

B9, p. 107

“I wait for Willie to say something to Booeey, on-deck, but the coach has already taken off his cap and is picking at his kinks to [the refrain of, ‘To-morrow, to-morrow, I love ya to-morrow....’](#)”

TAOF, p. 331

“The split left them one game behind Coshwale in the UMSCAC standings, with another doubleheader tomorrow at the Muskies’ home diamond. [‘Tomorrow,’ someone said, and it became a refrain to nod to and repeat. ‘Tomorrow.’ ‘Tomorrow.’](#)”

An alienated member of the college community, in a state of notably bad hygiene, having read the college newspaper’s article on the team’s change of fortune, reacts with rage.

B9, p. 84

“By the time the Oldsmobile wheezes into the field’s lot, the Hill College News is [confetti](#) on the passenger seat. [...] “I’m glad the team is going out on a high note!” His whine is panicky. [...] [His breath could clear a locker room.](#)”

TAOF, pp. 380-381

“Henry ripped down the page, tore it into thin strips like [confetti](#), and peed on the strips. In the mirror as he washed his hands [he saw how he looked in his filthy sweatshirt. He hadn’t shaved or showered in days.](#)”

[the word, curiously, is “confetti” but the picture is not—what comes in long strips is *streamers*]

Wavering between swagger and self-doubt, the ballplayers rework the same short, iconic ditty from baseball lore—“Spahn and Sain and Pray for Rain”—thus casting themselves ironically as big-league.

B9, p. 104

“Guys say that when Sain is feeling it, you’d be off the reservation to use the bat for anything other than self-defense. [...] this was good for a late-inning chuckle and spawned the expression, ‘Crazy Sain and watch your brain.’”

TAOF, p. 402

““The real problem is pitching. We’ve never played so many games in so few days. Remember the old poem Spahn and Sain and pray for rain? For us it’s Starblind and Phlox and then get rocked.”

The Interlude:

At the same point in both stories—the final 24 hours before the championship game, the Prodigy AWOL from the team—the novels now take a detour from baseball, into their Illicit Romance Plots. Revelations emerging from the clandestine affair between ballplaying student and college administrator threaten a scandal. In *B9*, the affair is one of the two elements in the possible scandal. In *TAOF*, the scandal arises directly from exposure of the affair.

The threat casts a pall over the suddenly promising destiny of the scrappy underdogs. Both novels keep knowledge of the crisis from the rank-and-file players.

The characters enter a sequence of anomalous scenes that have much more in common with each other than with a story focused on baseball.

The overlap of events entails settings, plot points, imagery, interaction, narration, and speech. Moreover, the sequence occurs at precisely the same point in each text.

B9: pp. 131-136 (of 155) —starts: 84.5% into text; ends: 87.7%
TAOF: pp. 431-449 (of 510) —starts: 84.3% into text, by page count²; ends: 87.8%

In this run of pages:

- 1) Characters implicated in illicit romance and misuse of financial aid employ same thought process on how best to begin a speech.
 Bucky has to make a confession. Guert Affenlight has to give an address at commencement.

B9, p. 131

“Having seen my father hypnotize the crowd at his induction in Canton, Ohio, with his down-home delivery and polished gags, and having roadied for the off-season orations, too, I know it’s always best to open with levity – especially around potential hecklers”

TAOF, p. 431

“...he knew from his own student days how the most formidable professors always garnered the biggest laughs; the slightest display of levity, however forced, was enough to send spasms of giddy relief through a lecture hall”

- 2) This rumination is immediately followed by equivocating confession of involvement in the scandal to the Assistant Dean of Students (*B9*) or Dean of Students (*TAOF*).
- 3) Denied leeway or pardon, the accused leaves open the question of whether he will face the consequences, or flee.
- 4) The dilemma prompts a pilgrimage to a publicly displayed statue: the monolithic, god-like figure whose legacy the accused has long championed, and who in his own day took his own socially unacceptable secret to the grave.
- 5) Resolution of the sequence’s conflict pivots on the characters’ reveries of out-of-a-blaze-of-glory moments in long-ago football games. Two quarterbacks—both the Father—throw Hail Mary passes in a time-dilated moment in the pocket, danger swirling all around and visions of eternity on the horizon.

² How percentages are calculated: page number (not counting pages that precede the text of the novel in hardcover edition of *TAOF*) divided by page count devoted to text. *B9*, in single-space manuscript, begins on p. 1 and ends on p. 155. So: %age = page # divided by 155.
 The hardcover edition of *TAOF* starts Chapter 1 on p. 3 and reaches “The End” on p. 512. So: %age = page # minus 2, divided by 510.

B9, p. 136

“[The cameraman misses] Willie’s streak by the last Giant defender, concentrating instead on the big paw that jars the ball from Thunder’s hand. As the final second runs off the game clock, Thunder, in a billow of jerseys, digs the ball from the turf before tucking it to his broken ribs and slipping through a slit in the pocket. Nothing but daylight ahead. He points Willie to zig to the other corner and cocks his throwing arm. Sidney Jones throws off a blocker. Stolid and stony, Thunder sets his feet and offers the All-Pro defensive lineman a free shot – a bloody, bruising, concussive bang that’s too late to cancel the prettiest spiral ever captured on video.”

“Thunder misses Willie’s leaping catch. He misses Willie’s end zone kneel. He misses his wife and kids’ teary joy. But between chuffs of bile, Thunder distinctly hears the Eagle Announcer say: “Give thanks, Willie. You just caught a pass from God.”

TAOF, pp. 448-449

“Affenlight drop-stepped, scissored, dropped, scissored. The end would come from his blind side. Cavanaugh loved the go route, ran it like a big-college guy though he couldn’t catch anything, what a tease that made him, a purveyor of false hope with his racehorse strides, neck and neck with his man but not for long, no safety ever deep enough to be there to take credit when Cavanaugh dropped the ball. Still there was always the chance that this would be the one. [...]

It was then, as he finished his seven-step drop and heard Melville’s words and saw Cavanaugh gaining separation from his man, that Affenlight knew he was through with football, through for all time, he wouldn’t be back next year. Other things awaited. It was good to be young and to know it for once. So much unfolding to do. He had the laces, he patted the ball. Footsteps pounded toward him from behind. [...] but he no longer cared whether Cavanaugh caught it or not, and as the end arrived and his breath left him he couldn’t remember or imagine ever having cared.”

Between points lying 84% and 88% into text, either passage cut from one novel and pasted into the same spot in the other would fit neatly. But for the names of the football players, a reader would not even notice the shift. The action would move seamlessly, the imagery would match, and the tone would be unvaried.

The Interlude’s idiosyncratic run of events, while unrelated to baseball, operates in each novel as the plot mechanism to bring the Prodigy back to his team and the championship game.

The variations in the two sequences:

in *B9* the reverie precedes the statue visit, while in *TAOF*, that order is reversed.

TAOF interpolates between confession and statue visit a scene in which Affenlight extracts the Prodigy from the squalor into which he has descended.

[For comparisons of passages within the Interlude in *TAOF* to passages from earlier phases of *B9*, see Addendum B.]

Both books cut immediately from this sequence to the site of the championship game, a minor league baseball stadium where the national anthem is about to play over the PA system.

For the duration of this climactic game, virtual lockstep advances to literal, play-by-play lockstep.

The championship game:

In the citations that follow, percentage points illustrate how the stories’ action progresses not just via the occurrence of like incidents in the same order, but by their occurrence at closely commensurate intervals.

B9—88.4%
TAOF—87.8%

Each novel opens the chapter devoted to the culmination of the baseball story with the same set-up: a panorama of the stadium, and “The Star-Spangled Banner” delivered to the crowd by a washed-up character described as alcoholic in appearance. (*B9*: p. 137; *TAOF*: p. 450)

Recruiter-Mentor, fearing a team meltdown, assesses the players’ attitude before launching into his traditional fire and brimstone; he sees that in fact, no: His players are not nervous, but supremely confident—to the point of being blasé, as if they go to the championship every year.

B9—90.3%
 “They followed Tischler’s lead, **conducting themselves as if fate had already determined they’d leave as champions and that playing the full nine was a mere formality.**”
 (p. 140)

TAOF—88.6%
 “Schwartz cast his gaze around the circle one more time. What came back was **something beyond confidence, a sense that the game might as well already have happened.**”
 (p. 454)

The Prodigy returns.

B9—87.7%
 “equipment bag slung over my shoulder”
 (p. 136)

TAOF—88.8%
 “absurdly large Westish bag slung over his shoulder” (p. 455)

Late-inning action reminds underdogs that even in what has proven a tight game, the deck is stacked against them; tantrum by batter (*B9*) or catcher (*TAOF*) in reaction to bad call by umpire:

B9—94.2%
 “Jenna dispatches the twins to drag Al off by his snake tattoos before he gets himself institutionalized.” (p. 146)

TAOF—90.8%
 “Another half-second and he would have done something to get himself ejected, if not arrested.” (p. 464)

Late-inning action continues; the team’s behemoth uses his spikes—size fourteens—to efface the chalk line of the batter’s box:

B9—94.8%
 “Wayne steps into a sandy box, where the chalk has been mashed into the dirt. And what broken squiggles remain in the back, he obliterate[s] with a sweep of his **size fourteens.**” (p. 146)

TAOF—91.2%
 “Schwartz strode to the plate and pawed at the chalk-swirled back line of the batter’s box with his **size-fourteen** spike.” (p. 466)

The Prodigy finally takes the field, in the critical moment of the run to the championship, entering the game as a pinch-hitter in the 9th inning:

B9: start: 94.8%; end: 96.8% [pp. 147-150]
TAOF: start: 91.6%; end: 92.5% [pp. 469-474]

2 outs; Prodigy's at-bat quickly goes to 0-2 (not the totemic moment in which the next pitch would determine his fate, 3-2).

The 0-2 count also should obligate the batter to protect the plate and swing at virtually anything that looks close. Suddenly, the novels withdraw their psychological focus from the Prodigy and switch to the pitcher's point of view. Both pitchers are a single strike away from championship and glory, yet... they do what every pitcher has been taught not to do when ahead in the count: throw the ball anywhere near the batter. With plenty of pitches to waste before giving away a walk, the pitcher has multiple opportunities to throw whatever the batter can't touch, that even Babe Ruth couldn't get a stick on. Thus, the pitcher is in the catbird seat to bounce a curveball outside—far from the batter and his trembling bat. There's no upside to his taking the crazy risk of intimidating the batter.

Another salient aspect of this commonality between the texts is that it means not one but two hit batsmen in each novel's big game, both plunkings having been arrogantly premeditated by the pitcher:

B9—96.5% (second plunking)

“‘Never **put the go-ahead run on-base, but,**’
Blanks indicates Tisch, stretching in the on-deck
circle, ‘Homes swings a banjo.’” (p. 148)

TAOF—91.6% (first plunking)

“I’ll **put the go-ahead run on base, and** then I’ll get out
of it.” (p. 469)

In the final, truncated at-bat, both authors opt to step out of the baseball game once again and go with the same superfluous image:

B9—94.2%

“the ball hooks foul long **before diving into a
swimming pool.**” (p. 146)

TAOF—92.2%

“He dipped one foot inside the batter’s box, **as
if testing the temperature of a pool.**” (p. 472)

As the 0-2 offering looms, the Prodigy contemplates doing nothing, abdicating his at-bat’s outcome to fate:

B9—96.8%

“...and get ready to leave the bat on my shoulder.”
(p. 150)

TAOF—92.5%

“...since he had no intention of swinging at
the pitch.” (p. 474)

The ball comes hurtling in. Forgetting self-preservation the Prodigy is thinking, in terms of prayer, about the act of atonement he is preparing to make to his Recruiter-Mentor.

B9—96.8%

“Willie’s prayer has finally been answered, I
barely have time to think” (p. 150)

TAOF—92.5%

“His mind subsided into something like
prayer. Forgive me, Schwartz, for quitting
the team” (p. 474)

His moment of valor amounts to going down with a bang and a whimper:

B9—96.8%

“...the intentional-unintentional had found me and
my head, which now tolls the hour.”
(p. 150)

TAOF—92.5%

“He stepped sharply toward home plate,
dipping his shoulder as he did so, as if
expecting, diving into, a slider low and
away.” (p. 474)

He pays for his “free pass.” He takes the pitch right in the head, and though knocked silly, can go to first base with a clear conscience. He has kept his team’s hopes alive without hogging the limelight.

Post-game commentary is groused by the figure who first brought the Prodigy to college baseball:

B9—98.7%

““That ball you tugged foul into those poor people’s swimming pool should’ve gone to right!”” (p. 153)

TAOF—92.9%

““You dove into that thing like it was a swimming pool.”” (p. 476)

Now that the once-in-forever magical season has ended:

Each novel devotes its denouement/finale to the two plots still awaiting resolution—the Intergenerational and Recruiter-Mentor.

Intergenerational—

The Father, a onetime quarterback, having been threatened with exposure for misdeeds is suddenly and unexpectedly found dead on the day of a post-season championship college baseball game. In *B9*, this climax drives the Prodigy *out* of the game and initiates his AWOL, which culminates in his recruitment in the novel’s opening and the beginning of his coming-of-age; in *TAOF*, this climax thrusts the Prodigy back into the game after his AWOL and leads to his coming-of-age in his final at-bat. In both books, this pivotal moment—the revelation of the death of the Father—disrupts the 9th inning of a crucial game, changing the outcome irrevocably.

In each story, the follow up to the revelation of the Father’s death is a covert, indirect acknowledgment—to the Adult Offspring—by the figure who threatened the Father’s exposure of having done so. This party paid an unannounced visit to the Father immediately before the sudden, poorly explained demise. By implication, the new information reinforces the Adult Offspring’s suspicion that the Father’s death was self-inflicted.

In both books, the on-campus scandals (in *B9*, the Adult Offspring is a conspirator for the purpose of vindicating his Father’s misdeeds in the original scandal; in *TAOF*, the Father is a conspirator) are tied to the possibility that the Father’s reputation will be shattered. Thus the Adult Offspring panics at the news that a college administrator can blow the whistle on the scandal and destroy the Father’s legacy.

B9—98.1%

““Julie knows.””

““Don’t even say that to me.””

““Julie Ross, the Assistant Dean of Students, knows.”” (p. 119)

TAOF—94.9%

““He knows, Pella thought. He knows about

Owen. The Dean of Students knows about

Owen.”” (p. 486)

The two Adult Offspring choose the same criminal act to make posthumous amends and fulfill the duty to protect the deceased Father’s reputation: tampering with the Father’s remains to thwart forensic inquiry, or even mere speculation that the death was a suicide. The possibility that the Father ended his own life, if made public, would implicate him in wrongdoing and wreck his legacy.

In *B9*, the Adult Offspring confesses to having taken this drastic step.

In *TAOF*, the Adult Offspring takes this drastic step in real time.

The revelation of this criminal act takes place at the same point in both novels:

B9—98.1%

TAOF—98.6%

Bucky divulges that he rearranged the scene of his father's death to make it look like an accident.
[“When you found the bird...” (*B9*, p. 152)]

Pella Affenlight exhumes her father's remains, to give them covert burial at sea, albeit in Lake Michigan.
[“...scooped Affenlight up and over the side.” (*TAOF*, p. 505)]

Both narrators leave it to the reader to conclude whether the Adult Offspring acted out of hysteria or shrewdly carried out the Father's dying wish. The two novels choose to conclude the Intergenerational plots with the same indeterminate verdict: We have reason to suspect, but we will never know for sure.

Recruiter-Mentor—

The Recruiter-Mentor, who got the novel started by bringing in the Prodigy to play for the underdogs, and goaded and guided him through to his coming-of-age in the championship season, completes his own coming-of-age story. His trajectory began with orphanhood, passed through the trap of wage-slavery at a foundry and on to Division III college baseball, which for him has proved a dead end. He was once a star of the show, and now his glory days are over.

Each Recruiter-Mentor reconciles himself to this fate—by sticking around to coach Division III baseball for the team he has led to its first-ever season as contenders for the championship.

His coming to terms with this destiny fulfills a dubious thought he voiced to himself earlier in the book, when championships were still pipe dreams and possibilities were more numerous:

B9, p. 11

“... expectations were low, and the pay solid. If he could [get Elaine off his case](#) and concentrate on leading the lackluster Oaks out of the cellar for fifteen minutes, the doors might open for him to pick up the basketball job, double his take-home, and at some juncture rent a condo down the shore.”

TAOF, p. 425

“It wasn't graduate-of-Yale-Law money, it wasn't first round draft pick money, but it was okay. A person could pay his rent, his Visa bill. He could even, before too long, put down a payment on a car that could hold a quart of oil, [get the Buddha off his back](#) about his carbon footprint.”

The Recruiter-Mentor's trajectory, from resistance to acceptance, bookends the two novels. *B9* and *TAOF* both open their baseball plots with this character, at practice on a baseball field—and each novel's baseball finale is a reprise, with a new spin, of his action in the opening.

B9—99.4%

TAOF—99.8%

Mike Schwartz watches the Prodigy field grounders at a tournament to which he came as an opponent and sees the Prodigy as his team's salvation from its endless losing streak. (p. 510)

Willie Chance stroking flies over his players' heads, as an expression of his contempt for their indifference to winning and of his frustration with being stuck in this dead-end coaching position. (p. 154)

V. Content Overlap in Patterned Clusters—Meat meets Potatoes

To close this section of text analysis, let us take a look at one more such odd sequence of action that has nothing to do with baseball, and yet traces the same pattern in both books, in diverse elements: imagery, character psychology, narrator tone, conflicts, props, sound effects and specific behaviors.

The idiosyncratic yet uncannily alike sequences proceed from the same dramatic context:

The Recruiter-Mentor provokes the Adult Offspring by sneeringly invoking the Father's achievements and exalted position to diminish the Adult Offspring—who storms out and slams door.

B9, p. 25

“The screen door slammed....”

TAOF, p. 243

“The bedroom door slammed, as did the front door.”

While this is essentially rote, action both narrators choose the less common usage of the transitive verb—the character doesn't slam the door, the door itself slams.

The Adult Offspring then seeks an inanimate object to assault, as an expression of rage:

B9, pp. 24-25

“I line up the metal dumpster and hit it hard enough to [sprain three knuckles](#) on my throwing hand. A couple more swigs and jabs, and irony sets in because my fingers gnarl like winter branches around the bottle of peach schnapps....”

TAOF, pp. 248-249

[Pella] “...cuffed the skinny knotted trunk of a staked campus sapling with an open-handed slap. “Hate hate hate.” ... she gave the tree angry roundhouse slaps with alternate hands....”
“The [finger was either sprained or broken.](#)”

Each turns, figuratively, into a boxer working a heavy bag.

“[Pella] wound up to give the tree one last cleansing whack, but she swung too hard and, instead of cuffing the trunk with her palm, her middle finger struck the knotty bark awkwardly.” (p. 249)

Why does Pella need to damage her knuckle, given the gymnastics required?

Through the forward action, this injury is to figure in both novels as the physical, concrete reminder of the character's rashness and volatility. These “bruised knuckles” will make three more appearances over the coming twenty-five pages in *B9*, five more over the coming forty pages in *TAOF*.

These repeated references to the injured knuckles advance from simple paraphrase:

B9, p. 52

“My bruised fingers throb.”

TAOF, p. 249

“Her finger ... pulsed with blood and pain.”

The bruised knuckles also will function for each as the icebreaker and initial point of sympathy expressed by an on-the-horizon romantic interest. Moreover, the inanimate objects are personified:

B9, p. 52

“She sits next to me on the couch and delicately touches the purple spots on my hand. That gets my heart going. ‘Ouch,’ she says....”

B9, p. 62

“I vow internally to [never sleep with or have any intimate exchanges with a dumpster](#) again.”

TAOF, p. 250

“‘What happened to your finger?’ he asked.

‘Nothing. [I beat up a tree.](#)’”

“Do you want some ice? There's an ice machine in the basement of my dorm.””

Still within the attack-inanimate-object sequence, the Adult Offspring's flight happens to involve a floor sticky with an age-old accumulation of spilled beverage:

B9, p. 25

"I make for the back, through the gossipy whispers and my sneakers' squeaks as they gapw through the dried puddles of Coke."

TAOF, p. 247

"...but it would have been disgusting to walk around barefoot on those floors, slick with beer and the memory of mopped-up vomit...."

Weirdest of all, during each confrontation, some irrelevant bit player sits out of view, on a toilet. He is present, apparently, just to gross the scene up a little more, participating in the action by his grunting or snoring: *B9*'s Charlie "Potatoes" and *TAOF*'s Mike "Meat" arsch.

Meat and Potatoes share, along with their lummoiness, various coarse attributes. Each treats the others in the next room, and the reader, to an intimate connection with his bowel movement:

B9, p. 25

"At the end of the room, the bathroom door cracks open as Charlie Potatoes leans off his toilet seat for a peek...."

[Bucky high-tails it.]

"The bathroom door pulls shut, and Charlie Potatoes can be heard sliding back on his throne and chuckling faintly."

[Door slams on Bucky's exit.]

TAOF, 243-244

[Pella high-tails it; door slams on her exit.]

"A thin crease of light came from beneath the shut bathroom door. The toilet flushed and arsch's wide pink body, even wider than Schwartz's, filled the door frame. He scratched his balls through his boxers. 'You all right?' he asked, squinting without his contacts." [...]

"Meat's door clicked shut, and the bedsprings wailed mightily through the wall."

[A selection of similar clusters of plot event and imagery that form the structure of like sequences, with citations from both books, is presented in Addendum B.]

Once again, as in the case of the statue-visit-football-reverie sequence, a run of action and emotion, while highly idiosyncratic, appears in both books, with most of the same elements and virtually identical narrative texture.

Addendum A—stand-alone oddities

1. details, bit players and props:
visual/verbal imagery that mirrors/echoes between the two books—
similar text in similar context

Prodigy as the focus of fans' hopes and animosity:

B9, p. 115

"...half the crowd whistles relief. The other thousand or so groan."

TAOF, p. 267

"...half the crowd anxiously counting on him and the other half cheering for him to fail."

Players' reading on the bench oddly tolerated; they choose to read arcane literature:

B9: "the team is so populated with geeks I have trouble finding a baseball player among the lapfuls of slide rules and graphs. There are Statistics and World History books. There's Max Weber, The Medicine Wheel Way of Life, and Jacques Derrida" (p. 55)

TAOF: "Owen took a battery-powered reading light from his bag, clipped it to the brim of his cap, and opened a book called The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" (pp. 38-39)

Prodigy's interruption of this reading is greeted with scolding:

B9: "a relief pitcher reading *Light In August* dog-ears a page and looks up [at me], annoyed" (p. 55)

TAOF: "by the sixth inning against Vermont State, Henry could barely restrain his restlessness. 'Kindly desist,' Owen said as Henry's knees jittered and twitched. 'I'm trying to read'" (p. 39)

1) Baseball lingo, 2) describing the first pitch in a count, 3) at the exact same point in each novel:

B9: "the first one blazes in at the letters" (p. 120) 77.4%

TAOF: "the first pitch blazed past the inside corner" (p. 402) 78.4%

The underdogs' upswing:

B9: "the Hill College Oaks, at the midpoint of the season, step into fourth place [for the first time in a decade.](#)" (p. 68)

TAOF: "The Harpooners finished .500 [for the first time in a decade.](#)" (p. 48)

Improbable slapstick on a baseball field, with character seeing no alternative:

B9: "Clambering on top of the dugout, Coach Silver Duke Donnelly pulls his pants up to his armpits" (p. 112)

TAOF: "there seemed to be nothing to do but descend to the front row and clamber onto the top of the Amherst dugout" (p. 457)

The Prodigy's understudy fills the hole when Prodigy goes AWOL:

B9: "Snooter McDougal, normally the starting second sacker, who today, in Bucky LaMar's absence, had put on a performance worthy of note at shortstop" (p. 140)

TAOF: "Freshperson Izzy Avila filled in more than admirably for the absent Skrimshander [...] patrolling the middle of the diamond" (p. 380)

The Prodigy runs into a personal crisis; his tailspin is encapsulated by an onlooker from the stands, the specifically to see the team fail. Both speakers relish the Prodigy's demise:

B9: "“Evidently our star player went off the deep end.” (p. 149)

TAOF: "“Apparently the kid’s lost it.” (p. 316)

The big pep talk about winning the division:

B9: "“We have come a long way. We have fought the good fight. But it’s not over. We have earned the right to represent this division in the league championship.” (p. 118) 76.1%

TAOF: "“We’ve done the work. We ran and lifted and puked our guts out. We built this program out of nothing. We made ourselves proud to put on this uniform. We don’t have a single goddamn thing left to prove to anyone. We’re proven.” (p. 313) 70.0%

From underdogs’ perspective, arch-nemesis team described like movie/tv stars:

B9: "“...the rest of the crew leaned off the bench wide-eyed as if waiting for the big fluffy monster that puts everyone out of their horrific misery to get it over with already [...] as the Crusaders high-stepped to their positions to game show introductions.” (p. 17)

TAOF: "“The Harpooners spread out near the home dugout, stretching, chatting, pretending not to be nervous, pretending not to watch [...] When their [Coshwale’s] fifteen minutes were up they jogged cockily off the field. You got the sense they might come back for an encore.” (p. 310)

A cocky batter daring the pitcher to throw a strike:

B9: "“I crouch over the plate, daring the weak-kneed hurler to lay another on my table.” (p. 44)

TAOF: "“He crowded close to home plate, smothering it with his bulk, daring the pitcher to find a place to throw the ball.” (p. 404)

The Prodigy’s self-coaching, simple cases of geometry, to set up the “perfect throw”:

B9: "“For years I winged it at the plum tree in the yard, often to window-shattering acclaim. And by the time I was a teenager, I’d mastered the calculus of distance-over-armspeed and the art of curving the ball away from the neighbor’s dormers. Then one early spring day like this one, after plunking all the unripe fruit off the highest limbs, I was ready to take the legendary Thunder Bucks at the ball toss.” (p. 4) 2.6% [1739 words into the novel]

TAOF: "“He’d spent his life studying the way the ball came off the bat, the angles, and the spin, so that he knew in advance whether he should break right or left, whether the ball that came at him would bound up high or skid low to the dirt. He caught the ball cleanly, always, and made, always, a perfect throw.” (p. 9) 1.4% [1879 words into the novel]

The Prodigy’s impression of campus life (one in nostalgia, the other in first encounter):

B9: "“...the music is drifting from some cutie’s dorm window.” (p. 27)

TAOF: "“From an upper window somewhere drifted the sound of a violin.” (p. 15)

The Prodigy’s first impression of his coach at the Division III school:

B9: "“the guy is thicker than the carnie but not much taller” (p. 7)

TAOF: "“He was Henry’s height but thick-chested [...]” (p. 34)

The Prodigy’s baseball cap:

B9: "“When my cap hugs my thick bronze curls, I lean at the locker face and see the faintest ripple of flesh in the dull green paint.” (p. 40)

TAOF: “He’d swapped his green Legion cap for a faded red St. Louis Cardinals one. Shaggy dust-blond curls poked out beneath.” (p. 4)

The Prodigy, excluded from baseball, uses his motor skills to entertain himself, idly—off the field, he puts them to use with food:

B9: “I [...] load the back of my spatula with a pickle slice, and flip it across the kitchen into the waitress’ open mouth[...]” (p.16) 10.3%

TAOF: “He flipped a handful of sunflower seeds into his mouth and precision-spat the splintered shells into a little pool of Gatorade on the floor.” (p. 39) 7.2%

The Prodigy about to go into the Division III team’s line-up for the first time; POV character’s exasperation with being around losers:

B9: “I sprawl on the end of the bench, like a husband who has had too much shopping for one day.” (p. 53)

TAOF: “his tone that of a weary parent at the end of an exasperating day” (pp. 44-45)

Idiosyncratic characterizations of the Prodigy’s manner of on-field self-expression:

B9: “my war cry” (p. 56) 36.1%

TAOF: “war whoop” (p. 199) 38.6%

Shortstop’s gymnastics during practice:

B9: “After pointing at me, he commences a program of standing [back and front flips](#) ala Ozzie Smith.” (p. 41)

TAOF: “Henry, as he jogged out to short for infield drills, spun and [launched into a backflip](#).” (p. 38)

‘80s pop music stars feature in Prodigy’s infield chatter to his teammates as Prodigy suddenly feels his solitude on the team—a gulf between him and the rest of the players:

B9: “you can’t hear Cake, the ocean, or Billy Ocean. You can’t hear Pink, Pink Floyd, or even a guy named Floyd—” (p. 56)

TAOF: “Salvador Dali Dolly Parton Pardon My French” (p. 200)

Prodigy as Tarzan:

B9: “swing apishly from limb to limb” (p. 63)

TAOF: “baboon?—moving up and down in a nearby tree” (p. 249)

The *Great Gatsby* allusion to Prodigy’s big throw:

B9: The eyes of T. J. Eckleburg (p. 27)

TAOF: The green light at end of Daisy’s dock (p.164)

The Prodigy gearing up for the once-in-a-lifetime throw:

B9: “I let my sneakers hang over the edge of the curb, like my spikes had done a thousand times on a pitcher’s rubber.” (p. 27)

TAOF: “whipped his arm sidelong across his body, just as he’d practiced so many thousands of times” (p. 321)

The Prodigy’s difficulty talking to female lead in the “get to know each other” chat:

B9: "Julie Ross has me starting from the top, dragging me down a deep well (or is it a deep unwell?), from which I shoot up like a stone in reverse." (p. 52)
TAOF: "...the effort required to speak was immense, like hauling stones up out of a well." (p. 350)

Prodigy in conversation with coach about quitting team (coaches' office seemingly the same):

B9: "Willie's office has room for a metal desk, two chairs, and a radiator that only works in the summer. [...] "Willie's chair stops squeaking [...] Willie leans back and checks out his office all the way around and seems to wonder why he's never decorated it as though he were planning on staying, no personal effects to speak of." (pp. 122-123)
TAOF: "If you pretended not to know Cox and you walked into his empty office, sat in the only visitor's chair, and glanced around apprehensively, you'd never guess that he'd been coaching Westish Baseball for thirteen years. He might as well have moved in yesterday. The door was never locked. The walls were a plain industrial white, the metal schoolteacher's desk a lackluster military green. The main signs of life were a taped-up baseball schedule and wastebasket overflowing with pinched Diet Coke cans [...] "in pleather desk chair [...]the hinges screeched." (pp. 365-366)

Before key at-bat, Prodigy has momentary debate with his coach; the umpire expresses curmudgeonly impatience:

B9: "'Can I get a batter?' the umpire says in a monotone meant to remind Willie the man is paid by the game, not the hour." (p. 105)
TAOF: "'Let's go son,' growled the umpire. 'Season can't last forever.'" (p. 472)

Coach recruits player to give up drifting and return to school to play ball, derides recruit's current situation as prison; recruit gives sardonic reply:

B9: "'When I was in jail,' he breathes freely, 'I would've jumped at this offer.' 'I'm not in jail, Willie.' He snorts at the second floor window next to the flashing sign. 'It's a bachelor pad,' [I say]." (p. 30)
TAOF: "...quit acting like a spic and get his ass back in school? 'That place is a prison,' he said. 'And this isn't?' the coach chuckled and jerked a thumb toward the long low foundry building. 'This is just a shithole,' Schwartz said." (p. 104)

The Adult Offspring hiding her/his shame:

B9: "I cover my eyes. I can't stop Willie from seeing me cry, but I can't [can] keep from seeing Willie see me." (p. 126)
TAOF: "...her sweatshirt hood tugged up around her head like a burka. This didn't keep anyone from seeing her, of course—but it kept her from seeing them." (p. 396)

The Recruiter-Mentor longs for someone with whom to share his infatuation with the Prodigy's transcendent skill at shortstop:

B9: "I told him don't do it, it'll screw everything up. But he kept on and on, and one day while he was gazing rapturously, nay amorously, out at shortstop I had to yell, 'Jesus, dude, is this what's known as a Graterford shower-hour flashback?'" (p. 85)
TAOF: "He looked around to see who else had been watching – wanted at least the pleasure of exchanging a glance with another enraptured witness." (p. 6)

2. echoed lines in varying contexts:

B9: “people’s always gonna believe what they wanna believe” (p. 127)

TAOF: “But people believed what they wanted to believe” (p. 295)

B9: “the sky is moist and gray as freshly-poured concrete” (p. 121)

TAOF: “the lake, churned-up but calm, looked like fresh-poured cement” (p. 497)

B9: “‘You’re not looking so sweet yourself there, Lou. I mean look at you[...] You look terrible, Lou,’ Thunder tells him” (p. 43)

TAOF: “‘Henry,’ she said. ‘You look terrible.’ You don’t look so good yourself, Henry thought” (p. 349)

B9: “taking practice swings at the sun’s golden hum” (p. 142) 91.6%

TAOF: “took a few tentative swipes at the evening air” (p. 472) 92.2%

B9: “there is a victory celebration like no World Series ever saw” (p. 70)

TAOF: “they were having the victory celebration they’d seen on TV so many times” (p. 406)

B9: “Grimy sweat pinstripes my neck” (p. 105)

TAOF: “sweat and dirt streaked his face” (pp. 10-11)

B9: “late again: 5 for 5” (p. 5)

TAOF: “to use a trite analogy, he was oh for five” (p. 105)

B9: “it badhopped Jerry off the heel of his glove, and skipped across his chest” (p. 142)

TAOF: “it hit the heel of his glove and skittered away” (p. 201)

B9: “he knows what to expect from the meathead – hard stuff, up and in” (p. 145)

TAOF: “During the game, Schwartz had figured the kid was too small to hit high heat, so he called for one fastball after another, up and in” (p. 4)

B9: “Tisch totters on legs too tired to get back to work, but his spikes seem to find purchase.” (p. 70)

TAOF: “His back foot gouged at the dirt until it found purchase.” (p. 404)

B9: “Blanks’ skin is springing leaks all over” (p. 145)

TAOF: “Henry was down to his T-shirt, leaking sweat” (p. 22)

B9: “‘That’s funny?’ Willie grinned toothily back. ‘I’ll show you fuckin’ funny.’” (p. 8)

TAOF: “‘Filthy?’ he muttered to himself, staring out toward the mound. ‘I’ll show him filthy.’” (p. 470)

B9 (a lone paragraph): “Uh, boy.” (p. 49)

TAOF (a lone paragraph): “Oh boy.” (p. 277)

B9: “already I’m using foreign turns of phrase to describe myself” (p. 102)

TAOF: “turns of phrase he’d never deployed” (p. 255)

B9: “my bowling ball bloat” (p. 25)

TAOF: “bowling ball shoulders” (p. 195)

B9: “the thick tip of your pinkie snuggled in her panty band” (p. 95)

TAOF: “she slid her fingers inside the flap of his boxers” (p. 237)

Addendum B—clustered oddities relating to the Father and the football reverie

Each Prodigy's desertion of his team and subsequent coming-of-age journey is brought to resolution with an intervention by the stand-in father, who seeks out the Prodigy to deliver him back to baseball. He finds the Prodigy in squalor, amid a mess of rotten, stinking food. A promising athlete's going into crisis and a tailspin, engaging in self-destructive behavior, is a sports-story convention. Yet the two novels present the nadir of the tailspin in the same tableau—visual, verbal, and olfactory:

B9, p. 27

"I can't shake off the pain and swelling in my finger joints anymore than I am able to purge my lungs of the rotten stench. But lounging against sturdy metal that feels like a gym locker, I'm not ready to surrender hope... that the warm mist is billowing out of clubhouse showers (not from the wet night filtering through braids of spaghetti I've sprouted in my garbage shanty in the alley behind Cheese Stake). I spit out coffee grounds and an orange rind and claw the noodles from my eyes."

TAOF, p. 441

"A dense stench, like that of a fetid locker room, assailed him before he could cross the threshold. Scattered across Henry's blond-wood desk were several cylindrical plastic tubs of the kind yogurt or margarine comes in. Dotlike fruit flies buzzed about the lidless ones. They looked to be full of different kinds of congealed soup. Affenlight shooed the flies, picked up two of the containers, and carried them toward the checkerboard-floored bathroom, intending to dump them down the toilet."

TAOF's football reverie contains audible echoes of other passages in *B9*:

The once-in-a-lifetime throw:

B9: "batter's dream. Or coach's nightmare" (p. 5)

TAOF: "a ship captain's nightmare, a quarterback's dream" (p. 449)

The quarterback confronts his mortality:

B9: "He suddenly realized he would be dead someday, and be gone forever. 'Between the hashmarks I got the meaning of life – that there is no meaning!'" (p. 26)

TAOF: "Affenlight knew he was through with football, through for all time, he wouldn't be back next year. Other things awaited[...]but he no longer cared whether Cavanaugh caught it or not" and as the end arrived and his breath left him he couldn't remember or imagine ever having cared." (p. 449)

The magical-realist take on the stadium setting:

B9: "There wasn't a ripple to the sky, a spot of haze, or a pale day moon. Just blue air for days." (p. 137)

TAOF: "There was no hint of wind [...] the ball arcing through blue." (p. 449)

Addendum C—clustered items of overlap that drive scenes and plot lines

- a. Male Model Mound Aces
- b. Pizza Date
- c. Color-tagging of the Female Lead
- d. Illicit Romance
- e. Prodigy's AWOL

a. the ace who cares more about vanity than throwing strikes

B9

"his middle brow, which Willie had seen him tweeze in the weight room mirror during one of Al's marathon body sculpting sessions, hadn't darkened to the rest of his tanning-bed-orange – make that apricot – skin [...] Al flexed his biceps" (p. 12)

TAOF

"Schwartz remarked [in the weight room], 'you have the smoothest back of any man I've ever met' ... 'I just had it done...you know? Waxed' ... Starblind yawned, inspected his left biceps' lateral vein in one of the room's many mirrors" (pp. 30-31)

B9

"...who... no longer slid into bases or dove for smashes, whether a game was up for grabs or beyond hope. Al started coming to practice and games as though he were swinging by on the way to pick up a date." (p. 12)

TAOF

"This posed a problem for Starblind, whose extreme sensitivity to the smallest fluctuations in his own attractiveness led to frequent emergency visits to his stylist." (p. 125)

B9

"...his limestone teeth." (p. 47)

TAOF

"Starblind's arctic teeth" (p. 301)

When he cares more about getting laid than winning games is assaulted by team leader:

B9, 70.3%

"I commence by pinning Al against the barn with an iron clamp around his thick neck." (p. 109)

TAOF, 66.1%

"Schwartz fired his left forearm into Starblind's collarbone to pin him to the machine." (p. 339)

b. first date over pizza

Both novels launch into the boy-meets-girl-boy-loses-girl-boy-gets-girl-back plot somewhat conventionally: impromptu date, in both cases for pizza at an Italian eatery. After all, both male suitors are strapped for cash (Bucky has to borrow from his roommate; Schwartz has to figure out whether he's got a credit card with anything left to tap), so fine dining is not in order.

Each male has a history with the Italian place, and so is known to the fat old Italian lady proprietress/hostess—Bucky is awkward because he hopes not to be recognized and outed as not deaf in front of his companion; Mike awkward because Henry's not his companion tonight.

Each female lead is in the process of ending a marriage or an engagement. And this is the first date she has taken. While somewhat neurotic herself, she psychologizes the ballplayer.

The scenes' progression is close to lockstep:

—off-site committed partner happens to be bearded, and to live on the West Coast;

—ballplayer, apropos of nothing, gets into the fact he "speaks" or knows a dead language—his particular favorite angle of his studies—Latin for one, Greek for the other;

—Mrs. Ursiola = Mrs. Carapelli—unattractive, overweight Italian woman-proprietors;

—male responds to female’s psychoanalysis by stuffing his mouth with pizza;

—secrets to hide prompts a break-out-in-a-sweat moment:

B9: “Sweat beads in my hairline.” (p. 77)

TAOF: “Pella felt little beads of sweat forming along her hairline.” (p. 139)

—the nervously perspiring characters escape to the same place: the bathroom;

—female lead focuses on the ballplayer’s transformative impact on fellow baseball players(s);

—each male is older than his college cohort, and the female date appreciates that extra bump of maturity;

—“valiant eating” [*TAOF*, p. 142] is followed promptly by “Let’s talk about the estranged former love interest”;

—and the ballplayer’s roommate, it is remarked, is a profound snorer—in *B9*, the point being that Bucky cannot, as he’s posing as a deaf person, let on that he hears it.

c. color-tagging of the female lead

The female leads in rare descriptions of their clothes, wear lilac. Pella has eggplant bags beneath her eyes, and Julie is described as a plum:

B9: “in her lilac mini and matching tights, Julie Ross is a purple plum” (p. 61)

TAOF: “her lilac-colored dress” and “eggplant bags beneath her eyes” (p. 175)

In *TAOF*, Henry describes Pella as having a “strange purply hue of hair.”

The other color-tagging of the female lead: pale blue panties in the college version of the Tea-&-Sympathy moment:

B9: “powdery blue panties” (p. 100) 64.5%

TAOF: “snow-blue fabric” and “icy-blue” of panties (p. 353) 68.8%

In the female lead’s seduction of the Prodigy, who happens to be two years younger:

B9: “she clutches my wrists” (p. 100)

TAOF: “she grasped his wrist and guided his hand down the front of her body, toward the icy blue” (p. 353)

d. illicit romance

One conspirator in the Illicit Romance plot, in appearing to pull off the fraud that soon threatens scandal, gets cocky with the other conspirator:

B9: “‘Didn’t carpe diem, Ms. Ross’” (p. 101)

TAOF: “‘Well, carpe diem, as they say’” (p. 280)

Uttered to a conspirator by the only non-conspirator who is currently aware of the Illicit Romance:

B9: “‘Have you heard the expression: Criminals want to get caught?’” (p. 61)

TAOF: “the longing to get caught, to take credit for the crime” (p. 362)

Administrator broaching threat of scandal to conspirator in Illicit Romance:

B9: “So now we have a situation... (p. 128) 83.1%

TAOF: “I’m afraid we have a problem, Guert....” (p. 437) 84.9%

College officer who is a conspirator in the brewing scandal makes surprise visit to dorm room—is hit with sensory overload (stench/loud noise). To regroup, slips into stairwell, and goes on with his visit:

B9: “slipped his slender body and monster afro into the dorm stairwell to escape the bellowing and waited there for his heart to stop plunging” (p. 31)

TAOF: “he retreated to the stairwell, sucked in a breath of clean air” (p. 441)

e. the Prodigy’s AWOL

the start of the AWOL:

B9: (in a scene distributed from the novel’s opening onward) the Father fails to show in the stands; Bucky, realizing that his father is going to kill himself or may already have done so, walks out of championship college game in the 9th inning:

“...that spring day of such promise when Willie Chance quietly returned to society and I ditched the 9th inning of the most important game of my life, putting my freshman year and all else I’d ever known in the rearview [...] I can see myself back there, behind the dugout, pretending to hold my dong in a stall of the men’s bathroom, when I was actually slipping my spikes into my glove.” (p. 2)

“packing your spikes neatly in your glove and turning left outside the men’s room door” (p. 48)

Bucky, abandoning school and his team, is soon living in squalor.

Recruited to play for a college for the deaf, he goes undercover, using a borrowed name and a forged transcript. He is back in baseball, but no less AWOL—a cipher to his teammates.

TAOF: Henry, about to break a legendary major-league shortstop’s record, but having injured a teammate with an errant throw, is unable to bring himself even to try throwing to first. He walks off the field mid-inning:

“Starblind was yelling, his mouth moving, white teeth visible, but Henry couldn’t hear him. He handed him the ball.” (p. 323)

“Henry unbuttoned his jersey and folded it neatly into quarters, so that the Harpooner on the left breast faced upward. As always, he was wearing his faded-to-pink Cardinals T-shirt underneath. He laid the jersey in his bag, placed his glove gingerly on top, zipped the bag, and pushed it underneath the bench between his feet. He sat back, hands on his thighs, and looked out at the field.” (p. 325)

Henry abandons baseball, going AWOL from school and his team. Soon living in squalor. He has become a cipher to his teammates.

The Prodigy, now AWOL, runs away from it all and finds himself in baseball purgatory:

B9: “But behind me is that awful, unbroken darkness and the unrelenting slurp of black ooze” (p. 97) 62.6%

TAOF: “a flat, sullen expanse of awfulness” (p. 343) 66.8%

B9: “At my locker, I put the book in my equipment bag with the rest of my crap. I hang my head and drink up the aromas of glove oil, yeasty socks, and a Ben Gay tube leaking

root beer-smelling unguent, as if this were the last chance for gas before entering the desert. Misting up, I beat the tin cage with my elbows and fists. There's never an easy way. There are alternatives that absolutely stink. Willie's so bent on winning, he might brush off Goodnight the way he had my chewing tobacco warning; when reality comes to roost, he'd pin his going back to the pen on my squawk to Julie, and history would repeat – except a Bucks would go with him this time. Not that hard time could be any worse than the hard mattress in the flop room[...]Equipment bag underfoot, I hang behind a post on the platform for the next train" (pp. 129-130)

TAOF: "Henry sat down in front of his locker[...]He, not Schwartz, had messed everything up[...]And yet every memory that popped into his head as he sat there in that underground room thick with memories was a memory of Schwartz causing him pain[...]Schwartz had brought him here and now he was fucked{like Willie bringing Bucky to Hill}[...]Time to leave before somebody returned and found him here. He took the stairs, slipped out a side door, headed away from campus toward downtown" (pp. 377-378)

He faces ambivalence when he resumes his career, in the 9th of the championship game:

B9: "the only question I keep asking myself is whether I'll swing and miss to keep Willie a free man, or swing for the fences and my teammates' dreams" (p. 145) 93.5%

TAOF: "he didn't know what to wish for. If he didn't get to hit, it would be because Izzy made an out and the game was over. If he did get to hit, he was toast" (p. 472) 92.2%

He contemplates pitching despite the fact he is the team's shortstop:

B9: "...I decide I'll hurl the last half" (p. 151) 97.4%

TAOF: "Maybe I should volunteer, Henry thought" (p. 469) 91.2%